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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 304 10 July 1950

SUBJECT: Effects of a Voluntary Withdrawal of US Forces from Korea.

Reference: IM 302, 8 July 1950, "Consequences of the Korean Incident."

CONCLUSIONS

Voluntary withdrawal of US forces from Korea would be a calamity, seriously handicapping efforts to maintain US alliances and build political influence among the nations on whose strength and energetic cooperation the policy of containment of Soviet-Communist expansion depends. It would discredit US foreign policy and undermine confidence in US military capabilities. Voluntary withdrawal would be more damaging than a failure to send US troops to Korea in the first place or than a failure of US forces to hold Korea. Not only would US commitments be shown to be unreliable when put to a severe test, but also considerable doubt would be cast on the ability of the US to back up its commitments with military force.

DISCUSSION

1. US withdrawal from intervention in Korea on behalf of the UN, especially since UN action resulted mainly from US initiative, would disillusion all nations heretofore hopeful that US leadership within the framework of the UN could preserve world peace. As a voluntary act of the US, a withdrawal would damage US standing in UN affairs and would undermine the effectiveness of the UN as a device for mobilizing Western resistance to Soviet-Communist aggression.

2. The Western European allies and other nations closely aligned with the US would lose confidence in the military value of US commitments to assist them against armed aggression. This lack of confidence would militate against energetic measures to oppose the expansion of Soviet-Communism through the NATO and MDAP programs. Although some slight credit

Note: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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still might accrue to the US for initially attempting to honor its commitment in South Korea, most of the nations allied or aligned with the US are more concerned about US ability to counter threats of Soviet aggression than about US intentions to do so.

3. Pro-US governments, particularly in areas where the USSR could initiate limited military aggressions without openly using Soviet forces, would suffer serious losses of prestige. In some cases they might lose political control of the country or feel compelled to seek an accommodation with the USSR (for example, Indochina, Iran).

4. Whether or not US forces withdraw from Korea, the USSR has the capability of creating a series of incidents generally similar to the Korean affair, each one threatening either to bankrupt the US policy of containing Soviet expansion or to disperse and overstrain US military forces-in-readiness. Without directly and openly involving Soviet forces, such incidents could be created in Formosa, Indochina, Burma, Iran, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. The USSR will proceed with limited aggressions similar to the Korean incident if it does not estimate the risk of global war to be substantial or is prepared for a global war if it develops. Voluntary US withdrawal from Korea probably would encourage rather than discourage Soviet initiation of limited wars in other areas.

5. Upon withdrawal from Korea or certainly after another Korean-style incident, the US presumably would be forced to adopt one of the three following alternatives:

(a) Drastically revise the policy of general containment by reducing or limiting US commitments and by planning to combat Soviet-inspired aggression only at selected points where existing military strength would be adequate for the task;

(b) Begin partial military and industrial mobilization in an attempt to enable the US to combat any further Soviet-inspired aggression anywhere in the world; or,

(c) Begin total mobilization to enable the US to threaten to meet any Soviet or Soviet-sponsored aggression with war against the USSR.

6. If the US, under the pressure of Soviet-sponsored aggressions, did not drastically revise the policy of general containment but began mobilization on a fairly large scale, it would be politically and

psychologically more advantageous for the US to mobilize in support of US and UN intervention in Korea rather than to mobilize after a voluntary withdrawal from Korea.

(a) US mobilization after a voluntary withdrawal of US forces from Korea would do little to reduce the disillusion and defeatism that would spread in the Western world as a consequence of the withdrawal itself. While this disillusion and defeatism might not be fatal, it would seriously handicap military, political, and economic efforts to strengthen the North Atlantic community.

(b) If the US should withdraw its forces from Korea and then begin partial mobilization, Soviet leaders would be more likely to anticipate war aimed directly at the USSR than if the mobilization were begun in support of the UN intervention in Korea. It is possible that the USSR, if it should anticipate global war, would try to seize the initiative by attacking the US.